Dean's Faculty Advisory Committee
University of Tennessee, College of Medicine

May 5, 2008

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by the president, Dr. Renate Rosenthal, at 12:08 PM on May 5, 2008, in the Hyman building, Room 101.

Attendance

The following members were present:

Louisa Balazs, MD, PhD, Martin A. Croce, MD, Art Geller, PhD, Leonard Lothstein, PhD, E. Haavi Morreim, PhD, Linda K. Myers, MD, A.P. Naren, PhD, Renate Rosenthal, PhD, Claudette Shephard, MD, Robert S. Waters, PhD, Peg Hartig, PhD

Approval of minutes

The minutes of the previous meeting were approved as written. Minutes had previously been distributed by electronic means.

Business

Bob Waters offered a word of thanks to Pres. Rosenthal, for her excellent service this past year. The sentiment was affirmed by all.

The DFAC also warmly thanked former DFAC president Dr. Art Geller, who will be leaving for Cincinnati in the near future, and Dr. Peg Hartig, who has attended as the representative from Faculty Senate. Dr. Karen Johnson will be the next Faculty Senate representative.

Pres. Rosenthal then offered some followup notes regarding the Dean’s Symposium. Exec. Dean Schwab, who was unable to attend, had become aware that some DFAC members had expressed concern that he was not present at the event. Pres. Rosenthal indicated that Dean Schwab conveyed his great regret that a meeting called by Pres. Petersen, combined with some changes in flight schedules, effectively precluded his attending the Symposium.

Further discussion focused on ways in which the Symposium might be improved, perhaps reformatted or relocated.

Pres. Rosenthal then turned to the subject of faculty appointment letters. A committee now has been convened to review the template underlying these letters. Dr. Myers has been appointed to the committee, as has Pres. Rosenthal. It appears that problems with the letters are being taken seriously and that useful changes will be made for next year’s letters.

Dean Schwab recently announced that he plans to initiate a monthly column, distributed to CoM faculty, which he hopes will provide information to faculty regarding a variety of issues. He also has encouraged faculty to raise any concerns they would like him to address by sending an e-mail.
The members applauded his efforts for improving channels of communication between faculty and administration, but concern was voiced about the e-mail mechanism: It was felt that many faculty members, especially junior faculty who did not feel secure in their positions, would not want to express their concerns directly to COM@utmem.edu because they may not want to be identified as complainers. One important focus of DFAC discussion regarding the monthly column and faculty input was that there may be better options than asking faculty to send an email to a designated e-dress. For one thing, it needs to be clear who will receive and screen such emails. For another, it was suggested that it may be preferable to provide faculty with an opportunity to make their suggestions and ask their questions anonymously, as through a BlackBoard format. Another avenue that was mentioned was to remind faculty to bring concerns to their DFAC representatives for an initial discussion. Since some faculty may be reticent about sharing their concerns directly with Administration, such measures may encourage more active participation.

There was a strong sense in the group that it would be good if the DFAC president becomes a member of the group that collects faculty concerns and helps to select the ones to which the Dean will respond, as part of his ongoing efforts to communicate with faculty. It would also be important that the Dean's regular email "column," contains concrete responses and plans of action to address the faculty's concerns.

Per DFAC discussion, immediate issues for a Dean's Column might include variable compensation and issues surrounding the writing of reappointment letters. Further discussion indicated that, although variable compensation has been discussed at length in the past, it has not yet been implemented and the faculty is eager for an update. One potential concern is that clinicians who care for large numbers of indigent patients could, under some proposed compensation systems, receive considerably lower remuneration despite carrying a very heavy patient load. Any such plan will need to include a broad variety of meritorious activities that could be rewarded, beyond patient income, to allow for the low extent to which some patient populations are supported by adequate insurance. One option might be to guarantee a certain monetary amount, then raise that amount according to such matters as RVUs worked, papers published, research trials undertaken, or the like.

Another issue meriting discussion is the timing of annual evaluations. Some departments wait until fall, when salary information is finally available, before finalizing a given faculty member's annual review. However, the actual deadline for review is in the spring.

A related issue concerns the extent to which a given faculty member meets or exceeds goals. If the goals are defined minimally, it may be much easier to meet or exceed expectations whereas, if they are defined rigorously, it may be more difficult for faculty to meet or exceed expectations. Such ambiguities are one reason why the administration is attempting to define more precisely and uniformly the criteria for expectations in teaching, research, etc.

Next Meeting

The next meeting of the committee will be convened by the next DFAC president, to be elected at the annual CoM meeting on May 6, 2008.

Adjournment
There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 1:05 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

E. Haavi Morreim, PhD
Secretary